



## Custom Aran Workshop

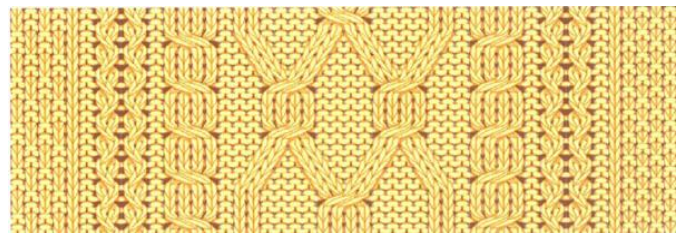
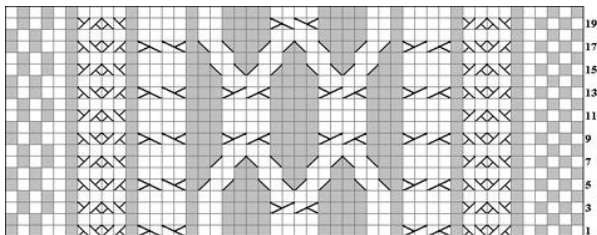
Most of us can knit an Aran from instructions but there is nothing like knitting an item that we have designed ourselves. This is an attempt at guiding you through the construction of a very basic Aran Jumper. Hopefully, you will be able to expand on these instructions and create an item that will satisfy the designer in you. For the sake of simplicity we will limit ourselves to a basic pattern. The front and back will be rectangles, the sleeves will have two options (with and without shoulder straps), and the neck will be a simple ribbed collar.

The first step is to look at a lot of pictures of Aran knits; jumpers, hats, scarves, anything with a cable pattern in it. What is it about the textured pattern that you like, what could be changed, which cables would you like to see together? Which filler stitch do you prefer; reverse stocking stitch, garter stitch, moss (seed) stitch, double moss? Try and collect as many illustrations as you can. From these you will select the cables and an idea of which layout you want to work with.

Finding the instructions and/or charts for a particular cable can be daunting. At the end there is a list of books that contain illustrations and instructions for many cables. For those more creative, Aran Paint© makes it easy to design and chart cabled patterns.

When planning your Aran:

1. Consider who you are knitting for and how the item will be used.
2. Consider the size of the finished item. You do not want a large person to look huge or a petite one to be swallowed by a bulky jumper.
3. Select a large pattern for the center panel, one or more narrow patterns for the side panels and a filler stitch for the edges. The side panel can be used for the sleeves or you can use a different set of narrow designs to create the smaller central panel for the sleeves. If you want to work with a shoulder strap, make sure that the center sleeve cable panel is not too wide for the shoulder (about 4 inches for an adult sweater, including selvage stitches at each side of the cable). The width of the panels can be altered by adding/subtracting the number of purled stitches between the cables in a panel.
4. It is a good idea to leave the underarm area of both the sleeves and body free of cables; elaborate patterns will not be seen under the arm and it would be bulky and uncomfortable to wear. This area will be knit with the filler stitch of your choice. Once you have decided on a combination of cabled panels, changing the size of the jumper will be as easy as changing the number of stitches that make up the edge filler panels.
5. When selecting patterns consider the row repeat. Try combining panels where the row repeats are multiples of each other. For instance, combining patterns that cross/repeat every 2, 4, 8 and/or 16 rows; every 2, 4, 6, 8 and/or 12 rows. It is easier to keep track of where you are in the pattern.



**The chart shows two cables that repeat every 4th row and one that repeats every 20;  
Double Moss Stitch at one end and Seed (Moss) Stitch at the other.**



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6. The choice of yarn is endless. You may want to stick with tradition and find a genuine Aran wool yarn that can be knit at a tight gauge creating a warm, long lasting, jumper that can be worn in the harshest weather. On the other hand, you may want the ease of machine washing/drying that acrylics and blends provide. The answer is, make a swatch. If you are happy with the results, forge ahead.

Which cables you select and how you combine them is entirely up to you but do keep in mind to:

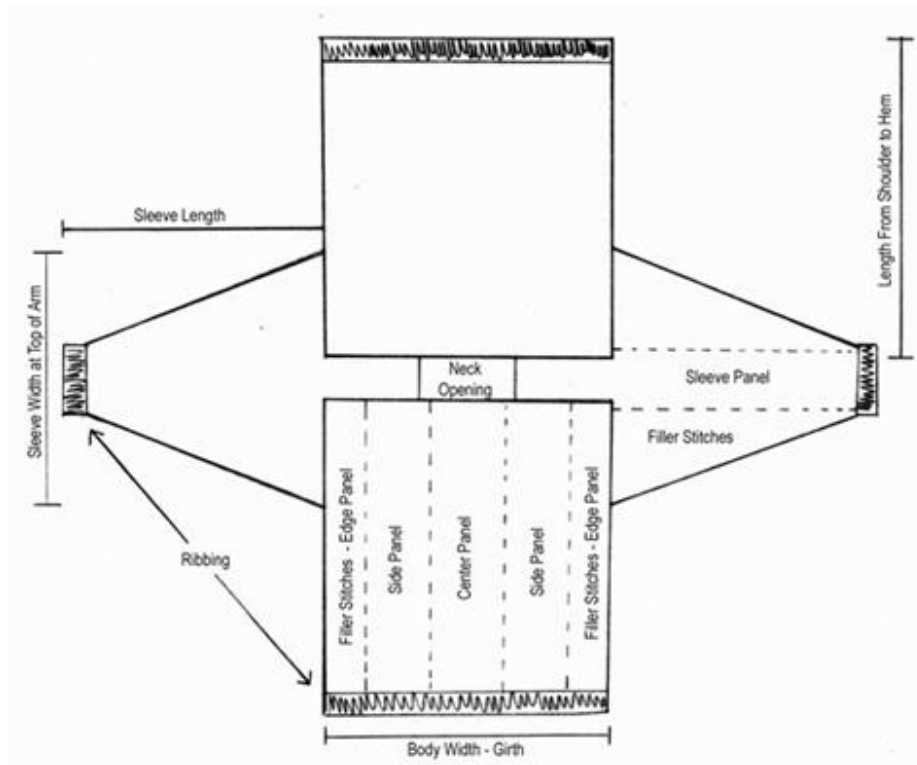
1. Take accurate measurements. If you have a pattern or sweater that fits well, copy the measurements. If not, you will need to know:

- a. length from shoulder to hem
- b. length from center front/back to hem.

**The difference between these two measurements is the width of the shoulder strap.**

- a. body width - girth
- b. neck opening - measure the head; don't want them to get stuck
- c. sleeve length (drop shoulder sleeves are about 2 inches shorter than regular sleeves)
- d. width at top of arm (twice the armhole depth)

2. Figure out how much ease you want; 2 inches is minimum if you are only wearing a t-shirt underneath, if more layers, a bit more ease would be best. If you have a much textured pattern, it will not look as flattering if worn tightly.



You have gathered knitting supplies, measurements, stitch patterns and hopefully have a good idea of what you want; time to knit swatches.

1. Make a swatch of the filler stitch and measure the gauge.
2. Make a swatch of the cable patterns and measure the gauge. The swatch should include a whole repeat of the pattern so you can also figure the row gauge. You do not want a cable ending abruptly.



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3. Figure out how many stitches you will need to cast-on for the body. Because cables need extra stitches to prevent distortion, how many stitches to cast-on is figured based on the filler stitches and extra stitches are increased to make up the difference in gauge. This is the reason many Aran patterns state the gauge in stitches other than the cables. The assumption is that if you can achieve gauge in the filler stitch your cables will be alright.

Let's assume that the filler swatch has a gauge of 5 stitches to the inch, the cable swatch has a gauge of 6 stitches to the inch and you want to knit a Jumper body front 20 inches wide.

For 20 inches with filler stitch at a gauge of 5 stitches to the inch

20 inches x 5 stitches/inch = 100 stitches

In cable pattern the same 20 inches would require

20 inches x 6 stitches/inch = 120 stitches

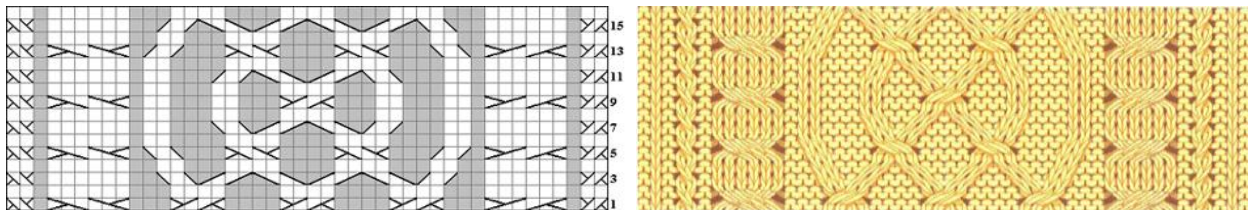
To maintain a body width of 20 inches, when combining all the patterns, you will need to cast-on 100 stitches\*, work the ribbing of your choice and then increase 20 stitches. These stitches should be increased above the ribbing across the place where the cable panels will be worked, not beneath the filler stitch panels.

**\*If you like a snug ribbing, cast- on for the ribbing and work with a needle two or three sizes smaller than the needle you will use for the body. For a looser ribbing you can use the same needle as for the body or one that is only one size smaller.**

You know your stitch gauge, now for the row gauge. The swatch for the cable panel should have a full repeat of the pattern. Measure to figure out how many rows per inch it covers, this is your row gauge.

# of rows per inch x length from shoulder to hem (less the depth of the ribbing) = rows of pattern needed.

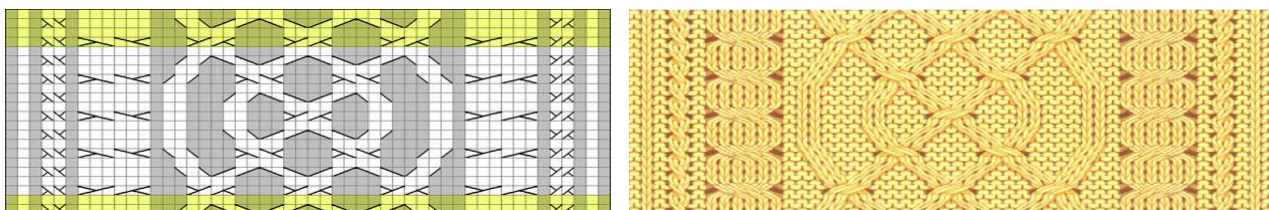
If you can not fit a complete repeat of the cable pattern you can: try a different pattern, make the item longer or shorter to accommodate the complete repeat or split the difference.



**A panel with cables that repeat every 2nd, 4th, and 16th rows.**

For example - you need 120 rows from the top of the ribbing to the shoulder edge. The pattern you want to use has a repeat of 16 rows ( $120/16 = 7.5$ ) which means that you can work the pattern  $7 \frac{1}{2}$  times. Half the pattern is 8 rows to be split between the top and bottom of the repeat. To fit the pattern, work the last 2 rows (15 & 16), work 7 repeats of the pattern and end by working rows the first 4 rows (1 through 4).

Yes, there are two rows missing but your pattern will be centered. If you add the two missing rows at the bottom, the pattern will look a bit off.



**Same pattern as above adjusted to fit with incomplete repeats.**



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Once you know stitch and row gauge, time to start knitting.

I like to knit the sleeves first; if I need to tweak with the pattern it is less painful to rip a sleeve than to rip a body panel which has more than double the number of stitches. If you prefer to knit the body first, go down the page to the body instructions and then knit the sleeves, your choice.

You know from your gauge calculations how many stitches you will need to cast on for the body and how many to increase to compensate for the cables. Using Elizabeth Zimmerman's % System you know that for the sleeves you will need to cast-on about 20% of the body stitches. A Jumper 40 inches around at a gauge of 5 stitches/inch requires 200 stitches for the body; 20% of that is 40 stitches.

Cast-on and work the ribbing of your choice, as deep as you like. Where and how many stitches to increase for the sleeve depends on how you want to shape the sleeve.

A "bit of math" first.

Length of sleeve from cuff (above the ribbing) to shoulder x row gauge = how many rows to knit

Width at top of sleeve x stitch gauge = how many stitches to achieve this width

# of stitches at top of sleeve - # of stitches cast on at cuff = how many stitches to increase

rows to knit/stitches to increase = spacing of the increases

For a gradual sleeve slope you can increase 2 stitches every other right side row; for a more steep growth, increases can be worked every right side row. Placing the increases is a matter of choice. Some people increase at the beginning of the row; I increase where the filler stitch meets the cable patterns. This is your knitting, place the increases where you choose.

Once the ribbing is done, increase the number of stitches needed (from gauge calculations) on the last row of ribbing (a wrong side row). Next row you will knit X number of filler stitches, Y number of cable stitches, X number of filler stitches. For the first few rows I like to place markers between all the cables. It makes it easier to keep track of where I am and catching mistakes is also easier. Increase according to the "bit of math" you just did until you reach the length/width of sleeve desired.

**For plain drop shoulder:** Once your sleeve is long enough, bind-off in pattern. To prevent flaring remember to work decreases when binding off the cable stitches.

**For shoulder strap:** You have arranged your cables so that there is a center cable that can be continued up the shoulder. You will need at least one purl stitch at each side of the cable to serve as selvage for seaming. Since the body pieces have not been knitted yet, it is hard to guesstimate how long to make the shoulder strap. At the beginning of the next two rows, bind off the stitches at each side of the centered shoulder strap. Knit about 4 inches of the shoulder strap and leave the stitches on hold. Once the body is knit you can adjust the length of the strap to suit your needs.

**The front and back will be the same.** Cast-on; work the ribbing of your choice. On the last wrong side row increase to accommodate your cable patterns. First right side row knit X number of filler stitches, cable(s) for side panel, center panel, the other side panel, X number of remainder filler stitches. Work in patterns until your front/back are long enough. Leave everything on hold for a moment; we need to figure the neck first.

**To figure out the neck:** the number of neck stitches is about 40% of the body stitches.

If you are working **with** a shoulder strap:

1. Add the number of stitches from each strap.
2. Neck stitches (40% of the body) - strap stitches = number of stitches from front and back pieces.
3. Divide the number from step #2 in half and that is how many stitches you need to leave on hold from the front and back pieces.
4. Subtract the number from step #3 from the number of stitches of the front (back) piece. The remainder is how many stitches to bind-off. At the beginning of the last two rows, bind-off the required number of



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stitches on each side of the centered neck stitches, leaving the neck stitches on hold to be picked up for working the neck band.

**Back to the pesky shoulder strap:** Measure the distance from the top outside edge of the body piece to where the neck will begin and knit the shoulder strap to cover that distance; leave the stitches on hold.

If you are working **without** a shoulder strap:

Less stitches will be bound-off from the front and back to make up for the lack of shoulder straps.

1. Calculate the number of neck stitches; 40% of the body stitches.
2. Divide the number by two.
3. Subtract the number from step #2 from the number of stitches of the front (back) piece. The remainder is how many stitches to bind-off.

At the beginning of the last two rows, bind-off the required number of stitches on each side of the centered neck stitches, leaving the neck stitches on hold to be picked up for working the neck band. If you want to, figure out how many stitches you need for the neck and join the front and back with a 3-needle bind off leaving the center stitches on hold for the neck. You can work the 3-needle bind-off with right sides together or with wrong sides together.

**Time to sew:** safety pins are great to hold the pieces together.

**Without the shoulder strap:** If you did not join the shoulders with a 3-needle bind-off, sew the front and back panels together. Center the sleeves on the armhole and sew them. Fold the sweater along the shoulder seam and pin together from hem to where the body meets the sleeve and from there to the cuff; sew the seam easing it along as needed; repeat for the other side.

**With Shoulder Strap:** At this point you should have front and back body pieces with bound-off edges and center stitches on hold for the neck. Two sleeves with top bound off edges and a centered shoulder strap with stitches on hold. Lay the whole mess flat and pin the sleeves to the body thus, begin at the top corner of the body towards the neck, then from the corner down to the edge of the sleeve. Sew following the same path; it is easier to fit the two pieces together. Repeat for the remaining three seams. Fold the sweater in half and pin from the hem to where the body meets the sleeve and from there to the cuff; sew the seam. Repeat for the other side.

**Neck:** Pick up the neck stitches making sure that you have a multiple of stitches necessary for the ribbing of your choice. Adjust the number as needed. Work the neck ribbing, bind off loosely. If you want a self facing neck, work about 2 inches of ribbing, purl one round (turning row) and work another 2 inches of ribbing staggering the stitches. If you worked knit 2, purl 2 ribbing and purled a round, work the rest of the ribbing purl 2, knit 2; it folds nicer. Do not bind-off but sew the ribbing to the inside tacking the live stitches down as you sew. Weave in all ends; block and enjoy.

**Resources:** I know that there are many other publications but these are the ones I have at hand.

### Books

1. Aran Knitting by Alice Starmore  
ISBN: 1-883010-33-0
2. The Best of Knitters - Arans & Celts by the editors of Knitter's Magazine  
ISBN: 1-89376205-X
3. Classic British Knits by Madeline Weston  
ISBN: 0-517-56477-7
4. The Complete Book of Traditional Aran Knitting by Shelagh Hollingsworth  
ISBN: 0-312-15635-9
5. Fishermen's Sweaters by Alice Starmore  
ISBN: 1-57076-029-2



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6. The Harmony Guide to Aran & Fair Isle Knitting by Debra Mountford  
ISBN: 1-85585-869-X
7. Knitting Around the World from Threads Magazine  
ISBN: 1-56158-026-0
7. Knitting from the Netherlands by Henriette Van der Klift-Tellegen  
ISBN: 0-97274-17-8
8. Patterns for Guernseys, Jerseys & Arans by Gladys Thompson  
ISBN: 0-486-22703-0
9. Viking Patterns for Knitting by Elsebeth Lavold  
ISBN: 1-57076-137-X

## Magazines

1. Interweave Knits
  - a. Volume 2 - Issue 3, Fall 1997, page 30  
*Knitting Arans from the Top Down* by Beth Brown-Reinsel
  - b. Volume 4 - Issue 4, Winter 1999, page 64  
*Starting and Stopping Cables* by Mary Spanos
2. Knitter's Magazine - Celtic Issue
  - a. Volume 40 - Fall 1995

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